

# DISAPPEARING FARMER'S TAN



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Poems by Ryan J Eilbeck

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*For my Grandmother Donna Eilbeck who told me I could write*

### **Small**

When I was small

I learned to talk

and then I learned to walk

Now I am 8 and I can

Write.

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**At the Sandbar (Drinking with the Ocean)**

Three kids wait with arms linked

*red rover, red rover is the tide getting lower?*

Or will you rise?

Blues breaking in your eyes.

The glass fringe gulps at their ankles

and tumbles the lottery sand.

They giggle from the same belly,

shoulders shrugged up like knowing the killer

in a movie will soon pounce from some square of dark.

A worthy swell drives toward them and they scream

blinking faster, shying almost away,

pants rolled up but too low.

The wave leaps up like the dog told no

licking their chins, leaving sun-splashed

globes hanging from their hair like mini-fishbowls.

Pure though planned surprise,

laughter soaks the air.

Half a mile down,

a drunk and shirtless man confronts the whole Pacific

*Come on...*

*Is that all you got you Mother Fuck-er salty pud*

*Show me a storm you kiddie pool of piss*



He pats his burnt chest just below a gold cross

flexing his arms,

wrapped in the vines of dull green tattoos.

I walk out to sea and I stand,

feet sinking into the sandbar

between blind wonder and a slur

at this world that holds me; a link

on the same chain.

The ocean sees it all the same.

Not fair - just there.

Boats called for lost lovers,

brands on beer bottles,

California;

all our names swallowed the same and never said.

Yet here I dare to ask you a question

mood ring of the moon,

are you all talk or all stomach?

Time piece, time annihilator

advancing just to sweep your tracks

as if to divorce your roaring mouth,

your violent face that pushes land back.

Three kids kick at the water.

The drunk man turns to the parking lot.

A peace I don't trust weaves through my toes.

## Love Bite

"Play the field," my Grandmother said,

family pictures on the fireplace,

Granddad reading the paper silently.

"Only get married if *you can't stand it.*"

I hear it again in my head when

I spy a red galaxy shaped like Cape Cod

on my little sister's neck.

Curling iron? No, not her style.

Bruise? Right- Ok. Okay.

I ask if it's paint. She shrugs a little.

His description is mostly a disclaimer.

My brotherly advice is akin to Grandmother's:

*That boy is a baby bird, you like chewing worms?*

*He won't leave the branch, but you, well,*

*you've got the hawk's span baby- soar.*

My Grandparent's are in their eighties.

They drink tea for two in the breakfast nook.

They still hold hands, play their trombones together,

watch the bird feeder more than the T.V.

They couldn't stand it.

### Charles's Cats

"They'll be fine," he said  
about separating the cats,  
"Just like people do."  
Somehow, I knew her father  
had told our fortune,  
I'd written it down.  
There would be new homes  
apart.

The tinctures of skin secrets  
fit in a casserole dish.  
I padded it with her clothes, then placed  
it in a shopping bag by the door.  
I should swing by, a book shelf  
holds some things I left behind.

"My Dad hates these cats," she said,  
kneeling in the driveway, combing her  
fingers through their clumped fur,  
yet he kept them fed and near the yard.

When his kids had all moved out, when  
she lived with Mom instead, when  
yard work replaced dating, did he feel Feline?  
Did he rub his side on the futon, same as a leg?

Scampering cats  
chasing string and laser light,  
one is more than nine lives.

### If I Must (Then I Must Be)

*"Yours is the earth and everything that's in it,  
And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!"  
- If-, Rudyard Kipling*

You are the grandson  
and so, by way of life to life  
you must qualify as a son too.

Have you run through the ribbon of 18?  
Then a man you may be.  
Named by the draft  
or job applications;  
by the God who classified the giver of the rib,  
falling with all our weight.

A man, my son  
and a grandson-

duty lives on your earth worn halo  
like rust on the lawn mower blade.  
Hands for the hammer, the steering wheel, certain weapons  
remotes, the spread wings of newspaper, signatures and handshakes.  
Today, they are to grip the smooth oak bar  
on the side of Papa's coffin.

I didn't know I'd be called to the flank of his rest.  
Called to lift, as a man  
to carry,  
to hoist and place.  
A knot in the even number of ties, because I was,  
showing my hard face in despair's sport,  
because *I am*.



So I was, a man.  
Like a place to hide.  
Like a pebble in the foot of a knight's armor,  
breezes blowing cold from the hollow torso  
down through the corridor of legs.  
I was the mask set to steel bravery  
barely merciful, even to the sword.  
The man was holding eighty years of life  
lightened in the journey toward something eternal.  
The man walked steady and did not cry.  
I was there somewhere too,  
tacked loosely to the shadow of it all,  
trailing behind the cape,  
  
the man.

### **Nosta-whata**

I read the sign "Baseball Nosta-Lodge-EEA,"  
and bought a Giants hat from it.  
I was eleven; hadn't broken up with the game yet,  
out for a week-long tournament  
in the red-stitched village called Cooperstown.

Good dim days,  
so full with *now* (well, then)  
that the Hall of Fame, wall-to-wall with black and white,  
home to dead men's faces living in bronze,  
couldn't stir that yet-to-be named feeling,  
that Grand Slam  
from the moment someone says,  
"Things were better then."

I read it "NOST-eeii-LO-GIA,"  
like the name of a native tribe.

Nostalgia. Sold to you often.  
Hand-written movie intros like the scratches you've  
had in your notebook for years,  
the old songs of bands churning out jokes of themselves  
like run-out Coke in the soda fountain,  
the throw back this or that,  
uniform / ball hat,  
the vintage-classic,  
barbed hooks on things you never knew could sing.  
Of all the things to guard in the world,  
we keep vigil for Nostalgia.

We try to contain the Big Bang of our  
NOW / THEN consciousness, the out-of-sight  
expansion towards former planets  
and unnamed galaxies.  
It gets blurry, plastic wrapped,  
too sad to buy back.  
I forget what I had,  
I forget why I'm sad.

A Giants hat; it blew out the car window.  
I was screwing around on a family vacation.  
A week later, my Dad crossed  
eight lanes of highway to get it back.  
I waited in the car, idling on the shoulder,  
hazards throbbing as he nimbly sprinted  
to retrieve that small piece of me.  
I saw it last in a laundry pile next to a dresser  
filled with my old baseball cards; the valuable ones  
in plastic sleeves, hiding in a blue box that  
says my name.

### **The Animals Run**

The body.  
The balance.

No amount of prayer or good faith  
alone can keep the temple intact.

Whatever higher powers may flicker,  
running reminds  
*you* are the immediate master of your body.

You must know this.

Your frame raised to one day break  
the pace of the walk.  
For Sport? Survival? Health?  
All lean toward wellness.

Not even the Cheetah,  
cocky with spots,  
wounding ground with its claws  
can outlast.

Not the Gazelle,  
made by science or God,  
with gold medal grace all creatures envy,  
the lightness and lack of effort in its legs;  
it's been told that we go longer.



My legs make their rhythm  
with no clock arms to guide,  
pistons burning something  
in my sad silent place.  
I breathe in my city earnestly, thick.  
My life, my love  
family, animal  
plant you are nearer to me.

The run slows to jog, then walk,  
my breath shooting out like Roman candles,  
the insides keeping me alive screaming  
like an error in Operation.  
They say, I am here. I am yours. You are livin  
What have you done (it does not matter)  
Where will you run?

## Calling the Vet

Of course they were doomed,  
born with a curse; the whole litter mewling, cradled by  
the torn out seat-stuffing in a hearse on flat tires.

Of course we took them; a chance to be gods and healers,  
our internal boggle turning like mileage to spell "Mom."

We boxed them on blankets and sweatshirts,  
fixed a water teat to the side within reach,  
administered formula feedings in a warm kitchen-

none of it mattered. The weak ones  
died before the debate on names.

She was soggy-faced, her prize pick  
wrapped in a cardboard coffin box  
like a Christmas gift.

It weighed less than a Beanie Baby, its yellow eyes  
shut beneath stuffed animal fur for always.  
I dug a hole out front with a stone and tucked the box under  
heavy mud clumps, then smoothed it over.

I bet their mother was out hunting  
when we stole them; kidnappers with sympathy  
hemorrhaging from our heads, visions of us in stride with nature  
We, the dictators of soil, the taxidermists  
asleep under sewn sacks of stolen feathers.  
The door opening on our shoebox ambulance  
sings a corrugated dirge.  
With one arm like a sickle, the other a shovel,  
doomed to bury everything we've touched.

Of course they were.

## **Hausfrau Haven (No Comforters)**

Hungover  
at  
the  
Laundromat;  
everything on spin cycle.

COLD / COLD / MIXED LOAD

An Asteroids arcade game blinks  
through its demo. Hand streaks  
near the start button are more visible  
than the screen. Its counterpart in the corner  
is burnt out. Unplugged. Quit on.  
Christmas music is four weeks early and I'm kind of singing  
with thirteen quarters and two dryers going.  
Nauseously, I identify the shirt I'd like to wear  
the rest of the day; fading jeans that will soon  
fit tight and right, belt-less.  
Suddenly, the underwear. Not mine, alive,  
somersaulting through the air like an acrobat,  
leaping over and on top of *my* rightful clothes,  
the white waistband smirking,  
the bright blue briefs yelling HA HA  
through the leg holes.  
My stomach suds up and whirls.  
The mismatched tornado tumbles on,  
devouring the past in heated circles.

## **Free Pony Rides**

The Amish boy leads the horse.  
I wandered after the wedding vows  
to find him mid-stride, reigns in hand  
like a sacred book.  
Boy, maybe eleven or thirteen,  
the hired help to amuse special-occasion Christians;  
what do you think of these metro-sexual thirty-year-olds  
on the saddle as you guide your horse through the curated lawn?  
Extravagant, the two of them in line  
with undone tie, heels kicked aside like  
going to bed together, smoking like, "Well, that was nice."  
"Make it gallop!" One calls to the lady rider.  
I squint, holding a half amber glass to the loosening sun.  
Boy looks ahead blankly toward the valet  
still cramming cars into small spots around the cul-de-sac.  
The horse will not gallop under the spell of their words,  
for their free time or pleasure; only if tugged the trained way.  
The horse, obliging, works under control of boy,  
eleven or thirteen.  
See her legs shine like a buffed car bumper  
spread wide over the horse's belly,  
her bouncing earrings lassoing the bitable summer air.  
Will boy fantasize about her at home?  
On plain sheets under a shameful sweat?  
Boy, I've done that. Laid in private lust;  
felt grunts in me like a bull slamming the gate.



But I was your haircut; looks long, passed permission  
but there's a cliff at the ears,  
a falling feeling, a trip down to iron darkness,  
a kickback from the shoe, my mind with hissing wings  
like the quarter-sized flies circling the mane.  
Where did you hide when the dancing began?  
When the garter, worn high on the Bride's thigh  
met the air, quivering with pink lace.  
Where were your reaching hands?  
I wonder what you know, Amish boy? No- I know you.  
Our pants ride high above white socks;  
a stiff farm hand stance, a starched blue shirt tucked in.  
The young masters, calling trust a good grip,  
  
clenching the loose leather linked to  
a power cars claim to carry, the wild  
veins rippling over the swollen joints of four sturdy legs.  
The Amish boy loves the horse. He pats its side firmly  
as the newly-weds crash cake into each other's mouth.  
The slender face bows to eat from his hand.

## **Tenderness**

I held the imitation anatomy  
like a cooking spoon.

"Bigger than mine," I said,  
fake putting it on upside down.

"It's curved," she said,  
turning it right for me,  
my hand around it  
testing its weight.

She pressed a silver button and  
the black sparkling wand started humming.  
I laughed while ocean vibrations  
coursed through my hand.  
She looked beyond my shoulder,  
half smiling.

It must feel wonderful; its duty  
a footnote to passion, both bodies  
feasting from a full plate.

*Removable*, I thought  
as she hung it on the wall by the straps  
near a scarf.

The most clever device;  
Adam with the rotten parts totally invisible,  
the beast of eagerness harnessed,  
an unwavering institution of some syntheti

genius, really.

Sufficient, certainly  
it is.

I left the bedroom like a secret  
seeing its name everywhere,  
the wall ornament  
in the corner of my eye resembling  
a ripe Japanese eggplant.

## On The RD

I never liked *On The Road*.  
Wait,  
haven't read it-  
Not even the Wiki page.  
But I will tell you about it,  
like Cliff's Notes (™?) minus more.  
Some boys get in a car.  
Their penises throb the whole ride  
so they  
throw them wildly (not surprisingly) to the wind  
with consequence like a gas station in the rearview mirror.  
They see *America*.  
It's different than TV and  
different than their town.  
It's uglier/more beautiful/arguable/ponder-able  
quite large,  
like a buffet;  
you'll want more than you can have  
you'll take more than your share  
you may leave sick  
too much, never again  
may come back  
though Canada is an option.

There are drugs-  
of course there are drugs,  
maximum life calls for certain amounts of drugs.  
Alcohol is there too, I'm sure  
but it wears off you know?  
You can't drink like you're 19 and get away with it forever  
Jack-

Music, yes.

The corrupting kind that pockets the youth  
and runs them right to hell,  
right in rhythm  
but never in line.  
Someone put cover and spine to the scroll,  
someone said NOVEL  
like a library might file it domestically after Kerner.  
Clerical collars were soiled,  
drop-outs dropped out-er,  
opiates showed up in the office,  
jazz was new math,  
school desk legs sprouted wheels  
and kids drove them off while fucking.  
I hear it was a good time  
but my high school didn't assign.

### **My Mom (about)**

My Mom Jazzercized  
while pregnant with my twin brother and I.  
JUMPING,  
WOOOing,  
WOO-HOO-hoo-ing with a Pat Benatar type headband on,  
her hands all Tina Turner up-in-the-air.  
She was kicking fat in the ass,  
purple tights stretching hard around her big belly,  
dancin' to the hits,  
shakin' her hips and rockin'  
our placenta worlds.  
She quit the paralegal firm, not the Jazz  
to raise us up right; making  
PB and J perfection and packin'  
pretzel sticks in a ziplock baggie.  
She's the cool field trip Mom,  
the *Oh no, I forgot to write a report on Gerald Ford, HELP ME Mom!*  
The *I'm-only-cursing-cause-I'm-watching-the-Browns* Mom,  
the master of that impossible two fingered whistle  
heard for miles as we lost in almost every sport.  
In another life, maybe as college roommates  
in some crum-sized town,  
I'd like to think we'd be friends; gossip grrrls,  
secret spillers. We'd get high,  
laugh at all the people who take life too seriously,  
talk about books and sob together after Tylenol commercials.  
I swear my Mom told me she smoked pot once.  
Once? Me too.

## **The First Thanksgiving**

Everyone is a cookie at the family table.  
Born of the same ball of dough and kneaded  
by my aunt's hands. Rolled flat, cut out as pumpkins;  
laid to bed on a turkey napkin and tucked under  
the same blanket of family frosting.

Our actual inhabited bodies are to sit at our coordinating cookie,  
the names written in brown frosting, all caps,  
font size and spacing showing her steady affection.  
My outlaw uncle with the pilgrim's name  
is to sit next to Kate; it's his new girlfriend.  
Kate's cookie precedes her. It looks like all of ours,  
but it's an outsider cookie; a cookie we don't trust yet.

We wait.

Their car pulls up the half mile driveway and soon, they enter.  
I stare at her to decide if she is beautiful or not.  
I say a lukewarm "Hullo." She seems at least friendly.  
My uncle sees my long hair and says, "Are you a hippy?"  
I say, "Yeah, I guess so."  
Kate says, "I'm a hippieeee!" And I assume  
this means she wears more than one bracelet and knows  
two or three surnames for marijuana.

She's very pretty and it's too obvious.  
She looks like someone who might ride  
a motorcycle in pre-ripped jeans. There's no hard chin  
no hazel depth in the eyes, no little yellow scar  
on the stubborn cheekbone,  
no marathon capacity in the lungs.  
I sip my wine and the cookies warp in the glass.  
The pilgrims made a main dish of disease.  
Marriage made a side-salad of divorce.  
My aunt made a cookie for her ex-husband's new  
blonde (fake, yes) girlfriend.  
We all eat together. It's peaceful, like a grade school  
reenactment of the first Thanksgiving.  
We are polite, uncertain of details.



## Health

I don't do video games these days.  
In college, OK  
yeah, on occasion.  
I'm not better than anyone, I'm just saying.  
Once, Santa won our faith with NES;  
the only "it" gift I remember getting growing up.  
"It" won us fake friends and zoned out sleepovers.  
I remember this special opportunity  
that most video games in that era granted.  
You'd be fighting scum. It'd be going really bad.  
You'd be taking kicks and bullets,  
falling down shit, ass getting kicked.  
Your guy would start blinking  
because death was so anxious to body slam you  
by the ninja mask.  
Then... ..  
HEALTH!  
YES! You found it!  
Maybe you had it hard and had to leap up  
to some secret cloud or crawl down some crap hole for it,  
but sure enough, it was there and made a boingy sound  
when you downed it.  
A pill. A beaker of bright juice. White square with red cross.  
In Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles, it was pizza that healed.  
Good deal.

Where is this in real time?

You say to me,

"You need to find a way to get spiritually and mentally healthy."

You've warp leveled to some sanctuary  
riding the ROYGBIV peace streak in the sky.

Suddenly, all your advice smells like Sandalwood incense.

I'm scrape stained and black eyed  
like Punch Out. Bleeding pizza sauce.

Yelling a lot, maybe crying.

These crazy half dude / half animals keep  
head-butting me as I smash the 'A' button  
desperate for some fungus to help me bulk up.

I'm blinking.

Health? A. B. A. B. AAAABBBB < ^ > > BA

low on life / low life

## **Hymns of the Morning**

Early on summer days  
I'd wake to my Dad's wedding band  
clicking on the ivory keys.

His hymns would nudge me awake off the living room couch;  
my camp site when AC was a luxury we still ignored as a family.  
There was often no sheet music, no scrawled chord progressions guiding him,  
just his hands knowing; finding the keys that agreed without looking.

At the time, it might as well have been  
an alarm clock prelude to my chores, the signal that a break  
from school could still be spoiled slapping paint on the peeling  
exterior of our house as some lesson of work.

But now, I'd speak of this less harsh bugle call fondly.  
I'd construct it into conversation so it appeared that  
I was always smart enough to be grateful for this gentle waking.

Music. Sweet music, even before breakfast.  
Sweet music before the brutal July sun and its thick hands of heat  
could club me awake through the blinds.  
Sweet music softly saying, the day is beautiful son,  
the world is yours.

## **We; The Rockers.**

Yeah, yea  
I got my hackey sack  
in a back pack  
half inch corduroys  
bowl cut head like the other boys.

My friends say they smoke weed  
and so do their band tees,  
but it's their older brothers who load up  
an apple and rip from a black hole too big  
for a worm to have made.

I saved twenty bills for an Everclear shirt  
that hung on the wall at the one and only record store in  
Berea, OHIO.  
The year of ALT-rock, Nineteen-Ninety-Airwalks,  
ugly people riding the radio waves.

Never heard the Grateful Dead  
but wore their beanie on my head.  
Caught it front row at the mall,  
that skull with the red and blue,  
did you see me? I see you, you, you  
watching MTV on Gram's bed  
in the cable sanctuary of youth.

At a sleep over we Oujjied by candle light

Jimi's spirit, voo-dooo child.

Morrison was way out of our realm.

Then Kurtd-

*come back.*

The girls with their eyes lined black, black light on a mushroom poster  
in your lonely lava lamp room.

Squire Strat; my Messiah.

Sing.

Howl.

Get me further than this god-damned-mini-van.

Come get me, take me somewhere beyond,  
to the clouds in a tie-dye sky,  
where grimy sneakers make you fly.

### **It's More**

I can't count the times

I've looked in the almost mirror;

a stretched out reflection of me escaped  
from a funhouse hallway and into this realm.

It's the greyer eyes that give it away. Hairstyle,  
posture, the longer face,  
the extra inch-and-a-half in his reach.

"Oh, you're the fun one and he's more serious,"  
people say, like it's science striking them.

The *this* one, the *that* one. Binaries that still earn  
just one title: The Twins.

"So what's it like?"

God tore apart a blood orange, stuffed it through our ribs  
and said, "Share."

Someone gave us the same birthday present  
and said, "Surprise!"

"Are you telepathic?"

We have four bars in a national park,  
color copy DNA like

Nature's best friend necklaces dangling inside,  
swinging in a similar rhythm. It's understanding,  
heavier than super power.

## The Warm Days

"If I hit him, do you feel it?"

Depends on how hard you swing.

"What's the longest you've been away from each other?"

I drive toward the sun and see his face  
in how I squint my eyes; in the lines on my forehead.  
I speak with the merged tone of him and Cleveland.  
I'm a tectonic plate, every shift or slip  
will affect the other and in turn, the whole.

So let's eat and drink; too much us.  
Here's my good times, confetti in your hair,  
my sad times with salt for your cheeks too.  
Here's to our never severed history,  
our two lives stacked like a Dagwood  
most couldn't stomach. More to protect.  
To shape. To argue against. Figure out how to love.

"Which one are you?"

I am no one. Who are you?

The warmest days fade.

Summer's silver fish belly  
turns yellow.

A knot of your hair and mine  
in my sock somehow  
like a smashed daddy-long-legs  
as I dress in the morning.

My sad sign, sagging Scorpio  
swings it's sting a lazy, low way  
in Augusts' panting days.

I still expect the sun to rise above  
the eastern apartment windows.

You and I under the dew of sweat on top of blankets;  
the onions to say good morning as I cook on  
the electric stove set to five.

Is this humble breakfast the victory  
we must always repair?

Some days stretch before our eyes  
and yawn though something inside us resonates  
with a low hummed note.  
Not a lullaby; memory with sound.  
Feeling stuttering and crashing into itself.  
Our train signals one station away, rumbling  
closer now, like elephants coming home thirsty.  
The walls shake, the earth feels small,  
  
bedroom sized. It arrives with open seats and I ask  
*Do I love my total(ed) self?*  
*Do you?*  
*Do I, you?*

I hug you as you're off to work, tucking  
myself in your pocket, your souvenir,  
a shark's tooth wrapped on a necklace.  
Once fierce and belonging to gums of brothers,  
now alone and thumbled for luck,  
snagging all your clothes.

The last mosquito flew off fat.  
We are dead eyes, two black seeds  
in a locust shell,  
God's drought maraca in a crescendo before the storm.  
How can we go on? How can we not  
count the seconds it takes the thunder  
to say, 'Remember lightning?'  
The rain is just, washing out the sidewalk.  
A warm perfume rises from the dark-grey slabs.  
The curbside stream floats up debris  
and the smell is almost sweet. A  
river, dead and new.

### **Brighten (the Corner)**

"Brighten the corner where you are."

My Dad would say this.

Still says this.

He even sang the old hymn, tweaked a bit;  
a revival for his special needs music class.

The corner; like the corner of a map (looks colorful)  
the corner of the rug (careful vacuuming it)  
the corner of your street and the next one (turn and walk to your friend's house)  
It was always in the key of optimism.  
A simple nugget of wisdom I carried as  
*Don't be an asshole or*  
*Give kindness where no one expects it.*

It still means this, I think,  
but in a shadow.  
It may be the darkest thing my Dad has told me.

The Corner.

Someone  
Something  
Life, presumably has backed you into there.

The Corner.

There is one way to look that is not part of CORNER,  
that is, face to face with whatever has you pinned there.  
You can look at *it* and only *it*. The only gallery,  
the landscape that is very near yet somehow  
wide-lens in your straight-on-vision and your peripheral.  
*There.*

Brighten that spot.

Dust gathers there,  
cat hair,  
human skin,  
pennies people throw away.  
Very low things carry membership there.  
Can you stand up there?  
Be a man there, a woman there  
a person there?

The Corner. The place where they stick a tube  
in your Grandfather's side because he won't  
admit he can't eat and it's gotten that bad.  
The place I know my Dad has cried  
though I've never seen it.  
Where friends, who claim that title  
in conversation, boast it on the internet,  
violate your most sacred trust.  
Maybe you've made the corner.  
Where your life seems more like  
the roadside of a national forest,  
every torn apart thing  
still smells, still stains,  
a clump of fur waves on a bone  
like a white flag.



You sing this heavy hymn  
into the teeth of air.

*Brighten the corner where you are*

You will feel very incapable. You are mostly incapable.  
Lanterns burn brighter in wind.  
Your skin will look like the white wall paint  
and you must say *glow*.

## **Nebraska**

Sometimes I wake up and feel Nebraska,  
the whole state sleeping hip-side on my sternum.  
I feel the endless roads parting the flood of corn  
after a harvest. I rise in line  
with the straight standing ghosts, feeling  
fellowship alongside their dry family. We are  
split ends of the dirt, empty of duty and purpose.  
I have no greeting for this day. I have nothing to say  
to the sad souls of my friends that are stretched  
so far that the tension is almost shouting  
*fill me, fill me*  
*How can this state be so long? So, nothing*  
But somehow that nothing is just sadness  
you can't name, a Grassman rumored-beast  
that passes barely through the edge of a photograph  
yet can draw everything into its shadowy stride.

I drive Nebraska on the double yellow line  
till it disappears, like birthday candles blown out.  
A gas station ahead looks hopeful.  
Hours and hours till I arrive to the  
pumps all off, not a soul in sight.  
The road side sign flickers a fading  
gold like a quitting moon.  
Nebraska is the continued drive,  
the needle resting on the orange,  
prescriptions in a cabinet, a co-pay.  
Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio.

## Where

I need to see where the sun goes down,  
whether it's between buildings  
or a background to cranes and shovel trucks,  
calling out their shadows like old-growth,  
sinking in our crude progress.

I need it.

Not in the name of "The West" or  
for an easier temperature to walk through,  
but to be forgiven;  
to see each arm hair illuminated by worth.  
To see gold on my skin, skin that hasn't quit me  
though it must know every fickle shade of my heart.

I need calm in the gradual bow of day that says  
rest souls, all souls rest.  
Work is over though the pavement is still hot.  
Stop squinting, here's clarity.  
This day's light will leave you as all things do  
but its reverence won't abandon  
if you stop to watch.  
I must know where the sun goes-  
Its falling disposition no artist could truly replicate.  
The time when atheists sigh and subconsciously nod  
to an invisible maker of all  
stroking the sky with impossible colors;  
the therapy of quiet orange,  
the passion of cloud-dipped pinks.  
I feel me unravel, almost a resignation.  
Thought dissolves, guilt leaves me,  
anxiety is cremated and scattered  
to live on elsewhere.

Night comes and I'm not afraid.

Things I've thought awake are worse than any dream.

Things I've read or been told

are darker than the bottom of moonless night.

May I know where you go?

Where the hands that tuck you in hide?

Let me fade on the fingertip of your last ray.

Let at least my legs through your window sigh of relief.

Or is this retreat the ritual to survive us?

A secret, always only half revealed.





Ryan J. Eilbeck resides in Berea Ohio. He is planning on a career in baseball. His skill as a catcher has already been recognized by Bleacher Authorities.

His earlier works are from manuscripts found in his first grade notebook. He shows promise as a good story teller... and poet.

Night comes and I'm not afraid.  
Things I've thought awake are worse than this dark day.  
Things I've read or been told  
are darker than the bottom of moonless night.  
  
May I know where you go?  
Where the hands that tick run at night?  
Let me hold on the fingertip of your last ray.  
Let it warm my legs through your window sight of relief.  
Or is this night the end of the world?



AUTHOR AT 28 COLUMBUS OH